



Pete Ricketts, Governor

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Nebraska Specialty Crop Projects Receive Funding from USDA Grant Program

LINCOLN – From popcorn and peas to honey and hops, specialty crops are an important part of Nebraska’s agriculture industry. Sixteen specialty crop projects are set to receive more than \$620,000 in funding as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). Administered by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA), the state’s program supports research, development and marketing of specialty crops.

“Specialty crops are important to Nebraska’s ag industry because they create economic diversity for the state,” said NDA Director Greg Ibach. “By focusing on critical areas like research, production and the environment, these new projects will help specialty crop producers stay competitive and grow their businesses.”

Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, horticulture and nursery crops. Two of the 16 projects in Nebraska are related to dry bean production. Nebraska ranks number five in the nation for all dry edible bean production. The state is number one in Great Northern bean production and number two in pinto bean production. The University of Nebraska–Lincoln will receive funding to: evaluate the sustainability of adding dry beans to dryland cropping systems in western Nebraska; and, identify sources of common blight in dry bean crops.

A description of the other specialty crop projects being funded in Nebraska and the grant recipients are as follows:

- Expanding hop production with local growers by providing educational resources and promoting a conference focused on growing, harvesting and processing hops—UNL;
- Reducing losses to sunflower growers due to Phomopsis stem canker disease—UNL;
- Identifying pea varieties and production practices for high seed protein content in western Nebraska—UNL;
- Inter-seeding cover crops into popcorn fields to help with the popcorn plant’s health and reduce weed population in popcorn fields—Hilger Agri-Natural Popcorn;

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- Identifying the best peppermint and spearmint varieties for production in western Nebraska—UNL;
- Reducing the use of herbicides in vineyards by replacing groundcovers beneath grapevines—UNL;
- Using ozonated water to control disease, reduce pesticide use and enhance plant growth—Mac’s Creek Vineyards and Winery;
- Extending the growing season of table grapes by growing them in high tunnels—UNL;
- Enhancing sustainable landscapes to promote honey production in bee colonies near agricultural fields in Nebraska—UNL.

NDA will also receive funding for specialty crop projects for the inspection of plants for pests and diseases.

Projects will have up to three years to complete their work. For more information about the grants or this year’s recipients, go to the USDA’s website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/awards> and click on “FY2016 pdf.”

NDA administered a two-phase competitive grant application process. Phase I involved the submission of concept proposals, which allowed applicants to explain the main points of their project. The concept proposals were independently and competitively scored by a field review panel. Projects with the highest combined scores were asked to complete Phase II of the application process. NDA funds projects that produce the highest degree of measurable benefits to Nebraska specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent.

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